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BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

African-American Mothers in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Afroamerické matky v románech *Chaloupka Strýčka Toma* od Harriet Beecher Stowe a *Milovaná* od Toni Morrison

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Anglistika – amerikanistika

Declaration

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.
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Permission

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Introduction

The mother archetype belongs among the oldest concepts across time and cultures. The idealized role of motherhood represents an important part of a number of religions and cultures – it is present in several African cultures in the form of a goddess or a beautiful woman associated with the moon and the ocean, as well as in the Western Christian tradition in the form of Madonna, the mother of Jesus Christ.[1] Historically, mother figures represented essential components in society – they ensured the creation of familial bonds, and provided nourishment and protection for their children. They also served as sources of identity by acting as mediators of socioeconomic, religious and cultural values in their communities. For example, West African mothers are not only associated with childcare, but might also act as advisors and conductors of religious rituals.[2] In Western society, mothers teach their children the basics of social behavior, and may act as mediators of basic religious concepts.

As the primary constituent of female identity, motherhood represents a significant theme in a number of literary works written by women, including Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Both novels are preoccupied with a set of characteristics connected to the role of mothers on the background of social and cultural oppression of African-Americans during the period of slavery and later during Reconstruction. Stowe's novel was influenced by the ideology of the Moral Mother, which became important in the abolitionist movement.[3] Moral and religious agency, together with a predisposition towards altruism and an ability to cultivate compassion enabled white women to empathize with enslaved mothers, who had to face a constant threat of being separated from their children. Their opposition towards tendencies of slave owners was reflected in women's literary works, including domestic novels. These novels portrayed African-American mothers in accordance with the conventions of white Christian motherhood and created an illusion of unconditioned, self-sacrificing mother love, which was supposedly common to all women regardless of their race and social status, and which was corrupted by the patriarchal institution of slavery.

Such a portrayal of African-American mothers, however, contributed to the formation of stereotypes. According to Toni Morrison, these stereotypes had a negative impact on the

[1] Remi Akujobi, "Motherhood in African Literature and Culture," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.1 (1993): 2.
[2] Lorelle D. Semley, "Mother is Gold, Father is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town," *Project Muse*, 10 June 2014: < https://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780253004888>.
[3] Elizabeth Ammons, "Stowe's Dream of Mother Savior: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and American Women Writers before the 1920s," *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 177.

formation of subjectivity of African-American women. For Morrison, motherhood could represent a kind of emotional slavery, which demands a complete denial of self-awareness of African-American women. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* then may be considered the revision of the representation of black motherhood in literary fiction. This thesis offers a comparison between Stowe's stereotypical representations of black mothers and Morrison's attempt to provide a more authentic image of black mothers' experience during the period of slavery. It analyses the ways in which slavery erased the boundary between womanhood and motherhood, thus preventing black women from recognizing their personal value independently from their role as mothers.

Structure and Methodology

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each consisting of a number of subsections. The first chapter entitled "Stereotypes and Black Mother's Subjectivity" is concerned with the concept of female subjectivity. It explains the opposition between subjectivity and objectification in connection to African-American female identity. The most well-known stereotypes concerning the representation of black women are listed, and their impact on black women's subjectivity analyzed, providing the theoretical background for the analysis of female characters in both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved.* The second chapter, "Idealized Motherhood and Its Effect on Black Mothers' Subjectivity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,*" illustrates the specific realization of stereotypes such as the Black Mammy and Aunt Jemimah in Stowe's novel. The depiction of African-American characters Eliza Harris, Aunt Chloe, Old Dinah, Mammy and Cassy are compared to the ideal of white Christian motherhood and domesticity represented by Mary Bird, Rachel Halliday and Miss Ophelia. The third chapter, "Motherhood and Recognizing One's Own Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved,*" analyses maternal aspects of language and concepts connected to maternity that contribute to Morrison's attempt to present a subjective view on slavery in her novel. The impact of mother-child bonds on the process of claiming black mothers' freedom is discussed in connection to the absence of African-American women's voices in American history. The fourth chapter "Representations of Black Motherhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved,*" compares and contrasts *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved* in terms of narrative strategies, methods of characterization and the image of motherhood in order to distinguish between the mother archetype and stereotypes concerning African-American mothers in literary fiction.

1. Stereotypes and Black Women's Subjectivity

1.1. Race and National Identity

To analyze the experience of African-American mothers in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, it is important to consider the concept of race in connection to the complex and for a large part paradoxical nature of American identity. According to Citrin et al., the United States represents a nation which is constituted by immigrants. Nevertheless, it has to cope with various obstacles in the process of assimilation of individual ethnic groups in American society. It does so by introducing the concept of national identity, which functions as a set of rules that are necessary for the coexistence of members of different ethnic and cultural groups in the United States.[4] In the process of assimilation with American cultural, economic and religious values, Citrin et al. distinguish between "identification *with*" (*self-categorization*) and "identification *as*" (*affect*). On the one hand, *self-categorization* is defined as identifying with characteristics of a particular social group. On the other hand, *affect* is connected with a socially constructed group identity with clearly defined membership criteria.[5] The process of categorizing African-Americans into a social group is in its nature closer to *affect*. Africans brought to the colonies in the eighteenth century never considered their skin color a mark of their identity; therefore, they were identified *as* Negroes by their white masters.[6] Simultaneously, they were forced to identify *with* the prevalent group and adopt its linguistic, religious and cultural values.[7] The prevalence of *affect* rather than *self-categorization* results in creation of various "controlling images," which are embedded in the label of race, and which helped to sustain white dominance.[8] This chapter explains the origin of those controlling images, and analyzes the ways in which those images shaped attitudes towards African-American women.

[4] Jack Citrin, et al., "The Meaning of American National Identity: Patterns of Ethnic Conflict and Consensus," *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. Richard D. Ashmore, et al. (New Brunswick: Oxford UP, 2001) 72.
[5] Citrin, et al. 74.
[6] Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 15.
[7] Citrin et al. 74.
[8] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 79.

1.2. Subjectivity vs. Objectification

The distinction between subjectivity and objectification is connected with notions of *self-categorization* and *affect*. It is formulated in bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism,* one of core texts concerning black feminist thought:

> As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's history is named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject.[9]

hooks considers the ways in which white oppressors deprived blacks of the opportunity to preserve or create their own cultural, economic and religious values. Besides the removal of names, hooks mentions the elimination of common languages in order to erase all signs of African heritage.[10] After they were forced to deny their subjectivity, slaves were further categorized into racial and cultural groups on the basis of binary thinking, in which differences are defined in oppositional terms, e. g. white/black, male/female, mind/body and subject/object. The result of those binaries is that one element is objectified as *the Other*, and is viewed as an object to be controlled as the subordinate group.[11] Black, female, and associated with the body, black women were forced to assume the subordinate position in their relationships with white masters and black men. Their objectification was fostered by stereotypes of black womanhood, which, among other things, appeared in the nineteenth-century literary production, particularly domestic novels.

1.3. Domestic Novels

Before analyzing the representation of black women in the domestic novel, it is essential to specify the conventions of the genre and women's role in its production. The period of slavery in the United States established the social hierarchy based on rules of patriarchy. Whereas white middle-class men were preoccupied with economic aspects of owning a plantation or another business, their wives were expected to receive their self-realization in the domestic sphere. Both men and women were supposed to identify with their roles. Men defined their value on the basis of their success in trade, and women on the basis of their homemaking and child-rearing abilities. As roles of men and women grew even more separate during the nineteenth century, women struggled to achieve gradually increasing

[9] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982) 42.
[10] hooks, Ain't 19.
[11] Collins77.

standards of maternal perfection and assume their position in local communities.[12] Attempts to achieve this perfection resulted in the idealization of motherhood, which gave birth to the ideology of the Moral Mother; i. e. the mother, who is able to change society through her moral force.[13] Women often posed as saviors on a sacred mission: they represented moral models for their children. They concentrated on the creation of homes to ensure a steady ground for their children's physical and emotional development. The ideology of the Moral Mother, together with the cult of true womanhood, saw the rise of the domestic novel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. American form of the domestic novel adopted the Victorian model of the sentimental novel. The most well-known authors of domestic novels were for example Lydia Maria Child, Maria Cummins and Catharine Maria Sedgwick. Their novels included situations portraying relationships between men and women, education of children and homemaking strategies.[14] With rising intellectual accomplishments of white middle-class women, sentimental novels attempted more serious topics concerning class, race and religion as well as abolitionist and women's rights movements. By introducing subjects that women could identify with, female novelists in the nineteenth-century America attempted to engage women in political and social issues, and spheres of interest that were previously dominated by men. They managed to do so by focusing their literary works on the private sphere, which was within the circle of the family.[15] Female novelists stressed their role as mothers and heads of households, and their ability to nurture and organize their families formed the core of women's presence in the abolitionist movement.

1.4. Stereotypes and Controlling Images

The identification of black women as devoted mothers, caretakers and domestic servants is the outcome of the particular model of motherhood that has been firmly established in domestic novels. Although planter-class women represented authorities in their households, many of them lacked practical and intellectual skills necessary for managing a household and relied upon a number of female servants.[16] Female slaves therefore constituted a substantial part in the economics of households and plantations – they participated in hard labor in the field and provided households with their servitude. bell hooks asserts that female

[12] V. Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2010) 10.
[13] Ammons 159.
[14] Shirley Samuels, "Sentimentalism and Domestic Fiction," *Oxford Bibliographies*, 29 Aug 2012, 31 May 2013 <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0015.xml.>.
[15] Claudie Raynaud, "Coming of Age in the African American Novel," *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 106.
[16] Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1992) 30-31.

slaves were able to perform so-called "manly" labor as well as "womanly" tasks of housekeeping, cooking and child care.[17] Their ability to cope with both male and female role in the economics of households and plantations threatened the position of their mistresses and black men. Domestic novels therefore tended to either "whitewash" or exaggerate the blackness of female characters to the extent that they were reduced to stereotypical images of black womanhood.[18] Stereotypes and controlling images such as the Black Mammy and Aunt Jemimah contributed significantly to the denial of female slaves' subjectivity and kept them confined to their subordinate position.

1.5. The Black Mammy and Aunt Jemimah

In "The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household," Jessie W. Parkhurst defines the Black Mammy as a household servant whose primary concern was her master's children.[19] A black woman, who participated in household chores but was not associated with childcare, was called Aunt Jemimah. Aunt Jemimah's duties were restricted to cooking.[20] Since both the Black Mammy and Aunt Jemimah were in direct relationships with the children of plantation owners, they were subjected to the ideology of the sacred value of motherhood. Collins writes:

> Regarding racial oppression, controlling images like the mammy aim to influence Black maternal behavior. As the members of African-American families who are most familiar with the skills needed for Black accommodation, Black mothers are encouraged to transmit to their own children the deference behavior that many are forced to exhibit in their mammified jobs. By teaching black children their assigned place in White power structures, Black women who internalize the mammy image potentially become effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression [...].[21]

Like her white mistress, the Black Mammy acted as a mediator of socioeconomic and religious values in her own family. The image of the Black Mammy, however, was not inspired by the position of a woman in traditional African societies, but was the outcome of an

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[17] hooks, *Ain't* 71.
[18] Bridget T. Heneghan, *Whitewashing America: Material Culture and Race in the Antebellum Imagination* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003) 112.
[19] Jessie W. Parkhurst, "The Role of the Black Mammy in the Plantation Household," *The Journal of Negro History* 23.3 (1938): 350.
[20] Laura Green, "Stereotypes: Negative Racial Stereotypes and their Effect on Attitudes toward African-Americans," *Perspectives on Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity*, 30 Nov 2013 <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/links/VCU.htm>.
[21] Collins 80.

attempt to portray African-American families in accordance with the Western model of Christian family.

1.6. Black Family: Representation and Reality

Melville J. Herskovits in *The Myth of the Negro Past* distinguishes three predominant models of identificatory relationship in African cultures – the immediate family, the extended family and the clan. The immediate family model in African cultures was based on the rule of the elder members in the clan.[22] The extended family represented a cooperative society whose members were more closely connected than the members of the clan. Moreover, the term "extended family" is more suitable for the most widespread form of familial bonds in the majority of African societies, since some of the African tribal societies fostered polygynous marriages. In those marriages, children might have been closer to their mothers than the common father; therefore, the extended families might have been in their nature more matriarchal. Moreover, the extended family tended to be established for commercial reasons, since landholdings were owned by whole families.[23] In the clan, relationships between its members were based on common language and religious traditions and rituals.

According to Herskovits, the extended family model had the greatest potential to persist during the period of slavery in the United States.[24] The Western image of the nuclear family could not be easily applied to the slave community, since the creation of such a family unit among slaves was not meant to ensure the continuity of family ties, but it became necessary for the accumulation of property and the workforce for the plantation. For this reason, there was a demand for young male slaves who were suitable for hard labor; therefore, the elders no longer represented the most important components of slave communities. Similarly, the elders no longer represented the mediators of distinctly African values – by the partial removal of common languages and religious practices, there was little background for more loosely connected clans. The extended family remained the most unified form of a black family, which enabled cooperation and circulation of survival strategies.

This image of the extended family, however, was perceived as a sign of primitivism and disorganization, which later created obstructions for the assimilation of African-Americans into the white American community.[25] To provide a proof of the ability of slaves

[22] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1941) 82.
[23] Herskovits 63-64.
[24] Herskovits 139.
[25] Lenus Jack, Jr., "Kinship and Residential Propinquity in Black New Orleans: The Wesleys," *Extended Families in Black Societies*, eds. Edith M. Shimkin, et al. (Chicago: Mouton Publishers, 1978) 240.

to adopt the Western model of the nuclear family, some of the nineteenth-century authors attempted to impose values of white Christian motherhood on female slaves in their literary works. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for example, introduced the model of a black family based on distinctly white values. Nowadays, Stowe's strategy might be perceived as paradoxical – on the one hand, it challenged the image of African-Americans as promiscuous savages. On the other hand, it created and perpetuated stereotypes of black womanhood. Stowe's distinctive method of characterization and tendency to impose the ideal of white Christian family on black slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

2. Idealized Motherhood and Its Effects on Black Mothers' Subjectivity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

The position of Harriet Beecher Stowe in the nineteenth-century American society is contradictory in a way that is similar to the position of her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the American literary canon. For the majority of contemporary American citizens, Stowe was an abolitionist and the author of the most well-known anti-slavery novel written by a woman. In the immediate circle of her family, however, she was also a head of a household, a wife and, most importantly, a mother. Stowe did not attempt to create a barrier between her literary career and motherhood. Instead, she believed that her position as a mother is the necessary element that enables her to assume her position as the female novelist in the abolitionist movement. Stowe's experience with the loss of the four of her seven children[26] might have provided her with the necessary sentiment and the ability to sympathize with the condition of black mothers who had to face separation from their own children. The concept of motherhood formed the core of her disapproving attitude towards the institution of slavery, and represented the framework for the majority of Stowe's novels – not only domestic manuals like *An American Woman's Home* (1869), which she co-authored with her sister Catherine Beecher, but also her major, politically motivated novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe credited the novel to her mother love and centered it on the redemptive force of motherhood.[27] Her method of characterization, however, gave birth to a number of stereotypes concerning the representation of black women in American society. Stowe's politicized ideology of Christian motherhood created a contrast between self-sacrificing mentality and individual needs of black mothers. The contrast, which will be analyzed in this chapter, represents a negative element in the process of the formation of the black female identity.

2.1. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a Domestic Novel

The categorization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into genre is problematic. Its depiction of black characters' attempts to escape horrors of slavery points out to the fact that Stowe's novel might share some conventions with slave narratives.[28] Notwithstanding, in comparison to authentic experience presented in slave narratives of African-American authors Frederick

[26] Elif S. Armbruster, *Domestic Biographies: Stowe, Howells, James, and Wharton at Home* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) 16.
[27] John Gatta, "Calvinism Feminized: Divine Matriarchy in Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Connotations* 5.2 (1995): 147.
[28] Michael Bennett, *Democratic Discourses: The Radical Abolition Movement and Antebellum American Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005) 118.

Douglass, Josiah Henson and Harriet Jacobs, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a work of fiction written by a white woman. Consequently, it does not provide an authentic image of black slaves. Male and female characters are characterized in accordance with the ideal of femininity – Tom, for example, is "aptly described as figuring a feminized and maternal Christ."[29] Consequently, characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are reduced to the stereotypical images of blackness. Similarly, the novel is not easily recognizable as an example of gendered type of literature known as "women's fiction." It includes the depiction of women in domestic environment, but does not convey an image of traditional passive domesticity, since its white female characters demonstrate willingness to break the law in order to help fugitive slaves.[30] *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a typical representative of the domestic novel either, but its focus on mothers, children and homemaking abilities implies white female readership. It presents concepts with which white women could identify, and depicts them on the background of important historical events, such as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. By these means, women gained access to the political domain and could participate in the abolitionist movement without leaving their domestic environment.

2.2. The Impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Abolitionist Movement

The publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influenced the abolitionist course to the point that when Stowe was introduced to Abraham Lincoln in 1862, he greeted her with memorable words: "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!"[31] Stowe's ideological link to Lincoln confirms American cultural expectations of nineteenth-century literature as sympathetic to the goals of abolitionism.[32] The calls for the abolition of slavery became even more frequent after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. The presence of the female novelist extended the sphere of abolitionist activity. "Every wife has it in her power to make her husband either better or worse," William A. Alcott claimed in his article "From a Young Woman," which was published in the book *The Young Wife's Moral Influence on the Husband* in 1838.[33] An important part of Stowe's readers involved educated white women from the emerging middle class, who could mediate their ideas to their husbands and

[29] Gatta 152.
[30] Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70* (New York: Cornell UP, 1978) 232.
[31] Cindy Weinstein, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the South," *Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Cindy Weinstein (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004) 1.
[32] Daniel R. Vollaro, "Lincoln, Stowe, and the 'Little Woman/Great War' Story: The Making, and Breaking, of a Great American Anecdote," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 30.1 (2009): 19.
[33] William A. Alcott, "From the Young Wife," *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the American Culture*, 11 July 2014 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/sneswaaat.html>.

influence the abolitionist movement as a whole. Stowe therefore popularized beliefs in the positive impact of female thinking to the extent that the ideology of the Moral Mother was considered to be an important part of anti-slavery sentiment.

2.3. Stowe's Politicized Ideology of Christian Motherhood

According to Ammons, the concept of motherhood was highly politicized before Stowe started to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[34] The representation of white middle-class Christian motherhood is closely connected to the cult of true womanhood, which became prominent in the United States in 1820s.[35] An ideal woman in the nineteenth-century America was expected to possess four values: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.[36] White women, particularly those of the emerging middle class, were encouraged to aspire to the cult. According to Kathryn Kish Sklar, the author of *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*, the cult provided the basis for what she calls "the ideology of qualitative motherhood." The ideology defined the basic moral principles concerning the upbringing of young citizens of Victorian America.[37] It also urged white women to recognize their personal values as mediators of political, cultural, religious and economic values for their children:

> By using what power women did have, Stowe and Beecher desired to increase the individual power and status of women, mothers in particular, and thereby to increase the strength of the family by creating a "family state," that is, a domain as big as the country. Numerous critics have discussed the influence of the ideology of domesticity on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with most viewing it as a method of female empowerment [...].[38]

By these means, Stowe illustrated the contrast between the patriarchal society and its matriarchal form.[39] In the novel, both black and white mother figures were introduced specifically to emphasize Stowe's notion of the moral force of motherhood.[40] On the one hand, a number of free white women of the South, such as Emily Shelby, Mary Bird, Rachel Halliday and Miss Ophelia, were introduced in order to illustrate individual attempts to resist

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[34] Ammons160.
[35] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151.
[36] Collins 79.
[37] Ammons 160.
[38] Lori Askerland, "Remodeling the Model Home in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*," *American Literature* 64.4 (1992): 786.
[39] Ammons 157.
[40] Jean Fagan Yellin, "Doing It Herself: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Woman's Role in the Slavery Crisis," *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 88.

slavery in the domestic environment.[41] On the other hand, African American female characters Eliza Harris, Aunt Chloe, Mammy, Old Dinah, Cassy and Emmeline represent stereotypical alternatives of white moral mothers. Their moral potential cannot be fully revealed due to their status as slaves, and Stowe appeals on free women of the South to help black mothers to complete their mission as mothers.

2.4. The Shelby Household: The Ground of Matriarchal Effort

Stowe attempts to begin her narrative on what William B. Allen calls "the ground of matriarchal effort."[42] According to Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), Shelby's plantation represents "a picture of the fairest side of slave-life, where easy indulgence and good-natured forbearance are tempted by just discipline and religious instruction, skillfully and judiciously imparted."[43] Mr. Shelby is presented as a "Man of Humanity,"[44] who teaches Tom not only to read the Bible, but also supports Tom's inclination towards Christian love and piety. His wife Emily Shelby acts as a mediator of domestic and religious values and teaches her servants, particularly Eliza Harris and her husband George, "the duties of the family, of parent and child, and husband and wife."[45] The family model mediated by Mrs. Shelby is that of a strictly monogamous marriage based on Western cultural and religious practices. Eric Foner claims that marriages between slaves were not recognized by the state and the church:

> [T]he slave family was central to the African American community, allowing for the transmission of values, traditions, and survival strategies – in a word, in slave culture – from one generation to the next. And when freedom came for slaves, legalizing their marriages and consolidating their families were among their highest priorities.[46]

In traditional African communities, permissions for marriages were usually given by family members.[47] In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, George and Eliza's marriage is permitted by their owners, but not by the higher authorities. Emily Shelby even permits George and Eliza to have a wedding ceremony, which created the illusion of a legal marriage. In Stowe's words, Mrs. Shelby's act is an example of the actions of women "whose natural sense of justice cannot be made to tolerate the enormities of the system, even though they hear it defended by clergymen

[41] Yellin 85.
[42] William B. Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom: The Political Philosophy of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009) 60.
[43] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 2001) 8.
[44] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) 41.
[45] Stowe, *Uncle* 84.
[46] Foner 18.
[47] Herskovits 168.

from the pulpit [.]"[48] After sealing George's and Eliza's marriage, Mrs. Shelby promises to never sell their son Harry. Despite being the head of the household, Mrs. Shelby remains detached from her husband's business affairs and appears to be oblivious of his intention to sell Eliza's son to the slave-trader. Mr. Shelby's intention to separate Eliza from her child is openly criticized by his wife:

> I have talked with Eliza about her boy – her duty to him as a Christian mother, to watch over him, pray for him, and bring him up in a Christian way; and now what can I say, if you tear him away, and sell him, soul and body, to a profane, unprincipled man, just to save little money?[49]

Mrs. Shelby's monologue illustrates Stowe's awareness of the religious hypocrisy. Stowe also criticizes the absurdity of the tendency to exclude women from the discussions concerning political issues in the United States.[50] Mrs. Shelby further criticizes male members of the abolitionist movement for lack of empathy:

> "This is God's curse on slavery!—a bitter, bitter, most accursed thing!—a curse to the master and a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil. It is a sin to hold a slave under laws like ours,—I always felt it was,—I always thought so when I was a girl,—I thought so still more after I joined the church; but I thought I could gild it over,—I thought, by kindness, and care, and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom—fool that I was!"
>
> "Why, wife, you are getting to be an abolitionist, quite."
>
> "Abolitionist! If they knew all I know about slavery, they *might* talk! We don't need them to tell us; you know I never thought that slavery was right—never felt willing to own slaves."[51]

Although Mrs. Shelby acts as a voice of morality when criticizing her husband's lack of humanity, she does not consider Eliza to be her equal. On the one hand, she enables her to have a wedding ceremony and teaches her the duties of Christian marriage on the basis of her own experience. On the other hand, those domestic and religious values are distinctly white and Eliza could not adopt them as a whole due to her status as a slave. Although she is supposed to marry, have a child and remain faithful to her husband, she has to face the separation from both George and Harry. In Mrs. Shelby's case, this situation would be

[48] Stowe, *A Key* 12.
[49] Stowe, *Uncle* 84.
[50] Brandi McCandless, "Slavery's Destruction of Domestic Life in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Ampersand*, 1999, 23 Jun 2014 <http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/vol2/issue1/utc.html>.
[51] Stowe, *Uncle* 84-85.

unimaginable. This approach then might illustrate the paradoxical value of Stowe's tendency to impose the image of white motherhood on female slaves, which did not necessarily result in equality between white and black motherhood.

2.5. The Motherly Northerners: Mary Bird, Rachel Halliday and Miss Ophelia

The Northerners Mary Bird, Rachel Halliday and Miss Ophelia represent ideal Christian women in the nineteenth-century America. Mary Bird is described as being gentle and pretty, but not strikingly beautiful, as physical beauty is associated with selfishness and vanity, like in the case of Marie St. Claire. Mrs. Bird is one of the most important characters in the novel. First, she is a wife of the Senator Bird, a very influential man whose voice might have a value in the abolitionist movement. Second, she challenges the Fugitive Slave Act by providing shelter to runaway slaves. Mary Bird's presence in the novel emphasizes the fact that the issue of race and slavery concerns women, especially those married to politically active men. Although Mr. Bird holds political power, he lacks the necessary enthusiasm and religious fervor, which function as foundations for the abolitionist movement: "Now, John, I don't know anything about politics, but I can read my Bible; and there I see that I must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the desolate; and that Bible I mean to follow."[52] Brandi McCandless considers *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be a criticism of prominent Southern families which participated in cruelty and injustice, and an appeal to female members of those families to mediate abolitionist stances to their male counterparts.[53]

The concentration of ideological forces in an all-female environment is further explored in the chapter entitled "The Quaker Settlement." Rachel Halliday's home functions as both church and school. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published before *An American Woman's Home*, Rachel's home is a literary realization of the "Christian House" proposed by both Beecher and Stowe.[54] In the Christian House, a mother is not only an ideal homemaker, but also a source of cultural, economic and religious values. In contrast to heavily idealized Mrs. Bird and Rachel Halliday, Miss Ophelia represents the most realistic white female character in the novel. Miss Ophelia attempts to educate Topsy, a slave girl, in domestic crafts and the catechism. Stowe attempted to dramatize a form of cultural education that can

[52] Stowe, *Uncle* 144.
[53] McCandless <http://itech.fgcu.edu/&/issues/vol2/issue1/utc.html>.
[54] "The Quaker Settlement," *Uncle Tom's Houses: The American Domestic Ideal, 1840 to 1870*, 1 Mar 2014 <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/utc/quaker.html>.

"maternalize non-mothers."[55] Miss Ophelia's attempts to educate Topsy, however, are proven to be unsuccessful, due to her lack of kindness and maternal devotion, which Stowe considered to be necessary components in the process of assimilation of African-Americans into white society.

2.6. Whitewashing and Exaggerating Blackness: Femininity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Black female characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are not portrayed with the same seriousness in comparison to the white ones. Their experience in Stowe's novel lacks authenticity and is often non-individualized. According to Lois Brown's article "African American Responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," the representation of "blackness" in Stowe's novel refers back to the antebellum age when "the very humanity and self-hood of people of color was perpetually questioned, undermined, and constrained."[56] The blackness of the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is either "whitewashed" or exaggerated to the extent that they are reduced to the stereotypical images of black femininity.[57] The tendency to "whitewash" blackness is represented by implementing the stereotype of the Tragic Mulatto and the Black Mammy. Its opposite, the exaggeration of blackness, gave birth to the stereotype of Aunt Jemimah. These stereotypes were discussed on page 6. Whereas female domestic servants in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are characterized in connection to their occupation in their respective plantations and their blackness is constantly exaggerated, the female characters associated with children are almost exclusively mulattoes. Besides the resolution to fight, Eliza Harris, Mammy and Cassy display a high level of intelligence, strong religious conviction and capacity to care. Black slaves are portrayed as "poor, simple, dependent creatures,"[58] therefore; their cause has to be voiced by either a white woman or a mulatto. Stowe evidently felt the necessity to introduce the female character with at least one drop of white blood in her veins in order to illustrate the capacity for sacrifice, associated primarily with the white middle-class femininity.

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[55] Mary McCartin Wearn, *Negotiating Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 32.
[56] Lois Brown, African American Responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, 2009, 3 Mar 2014 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/brown/brown.html>.
[57] Heneghan112.
[58] Stowe, *Uncle* 83.

2.7. Aunt Jemimah: Aunt Chloe, Old Dinah and a White Ideal of Domesticity

Often the blackness of domestic servants tends to be exaggerated to illustrate the suitability of black bodies to hard labor, however; the overly strong black woman undermines not only the position of black men, but also the authority of plantation mistresses by failing to be submissive, dependent and "feminine."[59] In the novel, Stowe features black women that represent the black version of white femininity: Aunt Chloe and Old Dinah. Both represent the confirmation of white feminine superiority. Aunt Chloe is round and plump, wears a turban and is universally acknowledged as being the best cook in the neighborhood. Aunt Chloe's kitchen is an important place – it serves as the gathering place for slaves from Shelby's plantation. bell hooks emphasizes the importance of the environment dominated by female workers in the plantation infrastructure. For hooks, domestic space was not exclusively the place of oppression – it was also the primary site of resistance. It was the personal space in which issues of oppression and dehumanization were openly discussed, and the strategies for survival mediated to children.[60] Aunt Chloe's kitchen, however, could never represent such a place of resistance. Heneghan mentions the constant intrusions into Uncle Tom's cabin, and its occupants' willingness to be supervised by their white masters.[61] For example, in the scene in which George Shelby eats Aunt Chloe's cooking and corrects Tom's writing, both enslaved residents of Uncle Tom's cabin admire his ability to read and write, and show gratitude for their young master's schooling.

Similarly, Old Dinah's kitchen in the St. Clare's household is the place meant for domestic instruction, not resistance. Old Dinah's domestic skills are constantly criticized by Miss Ophelia. Old Dinah is considered to be untidy and impractical, but is eventually dismissed as being "too old to [have] her ways [mended]."[62] Both Aunt Chloe and Old Dinah represent the confirmation of the necessity to train black women in domestic strategies in order to conform to the conventions of white middle-class femininity.[63] By idealizing the white middle-class domestic life, Stowe establishes the stereotype of Aunt Jemimah, a female slave whose main concern is cooking. Controlled by the stereotypical image of black womanhood, both Aunt Chloe and Old Dinah do not undermine the domestic authority of both Mrs. Shelby and Miss Ophelia.

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[59] Collins 85.
[60] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990) 42.
[61] Heneghan 111.
[62] Stowe, *Uncle* 317.
[63] Heneghan 111.

2.8. Eliza Harris as the Tragic Mulatto

Eliza Harris is an example of a "whitewashed" character. In *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, Eliza Harris is described as "a portrait drawn from life"[64]:

> While the writer was travelling in Kentucky, many years ago, she attended church in a small country church. While there, her attention was called to a beautiful quadroon girl, who sat in one of the slips of the church, and appeared to have charge of some young children. The description of Eliza may suffice for a description of her. When the author returned from church, she inquired about the girl, and was told that she was as good and amiable as she was beautiful; that she was a pious girl, and a member of the church; and finally, that she was *owned* by Mr. So-and-so.[65]

Why did Stowe choose to base her character on the quadroon? The quadroons are described as being victims of their divided inheritance: it was believed that from their white blood came intellectual dispositions, and from their Negro blood came primitive emotional urges.[66] It illustrates Stowe's tendency to search for the identification of subordinate blacks with whiteness, rather than trying to cover the elements that constitute blackness. The girl that Stowe encountered in Kentucky reflected the basic features of true womanhood, but in the writer's eyes, she was unfortunate to be born a slave. Stowe's description of Eliza matches the ideal of physical beauty in the white community:

> There needed only a glance from the child to her, to identify her as its mother. There was the same rich, full, dark eye, with its long lashes; the same ripples of silky black hair. The brown of her complexion gave way on the cheek to a perceptible flush, which deepened as she saw the gaze of the strange man fixes upon her in bold and undisguised admiration. Her dress was of a neatest possible fit and set off to advantage her finely moulded shape; – a delicately formed hand and a trim foot and ankle were items of appearance that did not escape the quick eye of the trader, well used to run up at a glance the points of a fine female article.[67]

The description of Eliza reflects the image of superiority of mulattoes due to their partly white blood.[68] By introducing a quadroon in her novel, Stowe attempted to enable her white readers to identify with Eliza. At the same time, Stowe made it impossible for the majority of black

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[64] Stowe, *A Key* 21.
[65] Stowe, *A Key* 22.
[66] Hartmut K. Selke, "Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Sheriff's Children*," *The Black American Short Story in the 20th Century*, ed. Peter Bruck (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner Publishing Company, 1977) 34.
[67] Stowe, *Uncle* 45.
[68] Mason I. Lowance, *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America*, 1776-1865 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003) 241.

slaves to identify with her character. It is implied in the novel that Eliza herself probably never knew her mother and was raised and educated solely by her white mistress in accordance with the ideal of white Christian womanhood.

2.9. Eliza Harris as the Black Mammy

Eliza would not apply as the authentic source of identification for black women even if her blackness was considered separately from her whitewashed identity as a quadroon. Besides reflecting the character traits of the Tragic Mulatto, Eliza is in terms of characterization closer to the Black Mammy. Black Mammies, according to Parkhurst, usually continued to help their mistresses even after the mistress' children grew up. As a reward for their services, Black Mammies became privileged members of the slave community, often to the extent that they represented an elite class among female slaves.[69] Although her role in the Shelby household is not connected to any children besides her own, Eliza was "brought up by her mistress, from girlhood, as a petted and indulged favorite."[70] In Stowe's words, Eliza's appearance reflects the status of her owner in terms of physical beauty and representative clothing. She works as a maid and her primary concerns are the needs of Mrs. Shelby. Eliza is not portrayed as participating in hard labor in the household, such as cooking, washing clothes or sweeping the floor. Instead, she is described as performing easier and more delicate tasks, such as helping her mistress to dress. By partly conforming Eliza to the role of the Black Mammy, Stowe creates the image of women as sensitive motherly creatures who inhabit the feminine sphere, where the racial hierarchy is established differently from the masculine sphere.[71]

2.10. Mammy

Mammy represents the colored equivalent of Rachel Halliday. She is "a middle-aged mulatto woman, of a very respectable appearance,"[72] characterized primarily by her close relationship with Eva St. Clare. Mammy is a symbol of the unjust institution of slavery. Although being an embodiment of the ideal of white womanhood, Mammy still suffers under the oppression of slavery. She, too, is privileged in comparison to the experience of the majority of black slaves – Marie St. Clare stresses the fact that "[s]he never was whipped more than once or twice in her whole life. She has her strong coffee or her tea every day, with

[69] Parkhurst 350.
[70] Stowe, *Uncle* 54.
[71] Joy Jordan-Lake, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2005) 29.
[72] Stowe, *Uncle* 255.

white sugar in it."[73] Despite the fact that Mammy was separated from her husband and children, she is entirely devoted to her mistress, as she sits many nights through the series of St. Clare's imaginary illnesses. Despite the separation from her own children, Mammy is entirely devoted to Eva in a way which simulates the relationship between Eliza and Mrs. Shelby. In *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory,* Kimberly Gisele Wallace considers the tendency to employ the simulation of the mother-child relationship, also called "the surrogate relationship." Mammy's own children do not appear in the novel; therefore, Mammy directs her maternal instincts towards Eva.[74] By these means, Mammy conforms to the stereotype of the Black Mammy, which is associated to the nurture of her master's children. For Stowe, the capacities for love and nurture are associated with all women, regardless of their race and social status. According to Erica Galioto, Stowe universalizes the maternal feeling.[75] This tendency enables Stowe to perpetuate the Black Mammy stereotype in her novel.

2.11. Cassy

Cassy is probably the roundest and the most non-idealized black female character in the novel. In contrast to Eliza and Mammy, Cassy's status as a quadroon does not represent any privilege – her mixed origin only further encourages objectification and sexual abuse, a topic not commonly discussed in literature during the slavery era. Despite the fact that she had a high class education and conformed to the Christian ways of life in the past, Cassy is fully aware of her subordinate position in the social hierarchy, and is disillusioned about white religious and social values that are forcefully imposed on blacks as means of control. Cassy attempts to resist the institution of slavery by showing a high level of pride and nobility, and she refuses to acknowledge her subordination to white oppressors. Cassy does not teach her protégé Emmeline the principles of Christian motherhood:

> "Mother used to tell me never to touch any such thing," said Emmeline.
>
> "*Mother* told you!" said Cassy, with a thrilling emphasis on the word mother. "What use is it for mothers to say anything? You are all to be bought and paid for, and your

[73] Stowe, *Uncle* 263.
[74] Kimberly Gisele Wallace, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011) 40.
[75] Erica Galioto, "Female (Mis)Identifications: From *Uncle Tom Cabin's* Jealousy to *Beloved's* Shame," *Women Writers: A Zine,* Jan 2010, 3 Mar 2014 <http://www.womenwriters.net/january10/Galioto.html>.

souls belong to whoever gets you. That's the way it goes. I say, *drink* brandy; drink all you can, and it'll make things come easier!"[76]

Instead, Cassy reveals to Emmeline the true nature of slavery, where the moral values of white Christian motherhood do not apply. Cassy's relationship with Emmeline is in contrast with the self-sacrificing power of other mothers in the novel.[77]

2.12. Black Mother Versus the Black Mammy

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe emphasized the positive impact of women's sentiment and religious agency on the abolitionist movement. Those character traits might have resulted from women's primary occupation as mothers. Through mother love, white readers were able to identify with African-American female characters in the novel. Stowe's characters, however, were not depicted realistically in order to illustrate the positive impact of the ideology of white Christian motherhood on black motherhood. Only slave mothers that adopted the image of white Christian motherhood were able to resist the oppression to a certain extent. Characters such as Eliza, Aunt Chloe and Mammy are compared with characters such as Prue and Old Dinah. Eliza Harris, who is taught the principle of self-sacrificing white Christian motherhood, is able to resist the oppression and save her son. Similarly, Mammy, who was separated from her children in the past, still manages to give unconditioned mother love to Eva, who is an embodiment of Christian love and kindness. Eliza and Mammy are contrasted with another slave mother who had to face separation from her children – Prue. Prue is not educated by a model of white motherhood like Mrs. Shelby; therefore, she is depicted as a drunkard incapable of any resistance. Prue then might be considered by Stowe a tragic consequence of the lack of white female influence on black mothers, and at the same time, on the abolitionist movement. Similarly, Aunt Chloe is an image of a competent domestic servant and a complete opposite of Old Dinah. The only character that is able to resist oppression and who does not function as a mediator of a distinctly white Christian image of motherhood is Cassy. In comparison to Eliza and Mammy, Cassy might not be considered an example of the Black Mammy stereotype. She does not teach Emmeline the principles of white Christian motherhood, which, in Cassy's opinion, could not represent an effective survival strategy, and is likely to keep Emmeline confined to her subordinate position. Cassy's characteristics, such as her pride and the resolution to

[76] Stowe, *Uncle* 534.
[77] Jordan-Lake 30.

protect her (adopted) daughter, are similar to the portrayal of Sethe in Morrison's novel, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

3. Motherhood and Recognizing One's Own Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

"My work requires me to think about how free I can be as an African-American woman writer in my genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world,"[78] Toni Morrison claims in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), one of the most prominent works of literary criticism written by an African-American female author. In the study of her own freedom, Morrison takes into consideration not only her occupation as a writer, but also her status as a mother. Like Stowe, Morrison does not consider motherhood to be an obstruction to her literary career. Morrison's image of motherhood, however, is not based on the popular Christian ideology that presents motherhood as a mission and the primary reason of every woman's existence. In her interview with Bill Moyers in *Moyers & Company* in 1990, Morrison stated:

> And *Beloved*, oh, I began to think about, really, motherhood and, – you know, it's not the all encompassing role for women now; it can be a secondary role, or you don't have to choose it. But on the other hand, there was something so valuable about what happens when one becomes a mother. For me, it was the most liberating thing that ever happened to me, having children.[79]

By describing her role as a mother as "liberating," Morrison pointed out to the mutual relationship between mothers and their children. Nurturing and supporting her children supposedly helped Morrison to reveal her inner better self.[80] The mutual bonds between mothers and children suggested by Jessica Benjamin are therefore important not only for the emotional development of a child, but also for the emotional development of a mother. In *Beloved* (1987), Morrison analyzes the obstacles that prevented African American mothers to form bonds with their children during the slavery period in the United States, and its impact on the formation of black female subjectivity. At the same time, unlike Stowe, Morrison presents a different approach to mother love, which is so strong that it creates obstructions in the emotional development of both the mother and her daughter. This chapter therefore provides an analysis of the maternal aspects of language and mother-child bonds in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in connection to the process of forming and accepting the freed black woman's self.

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[78] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 4.
[79] Bill Moyers, "Toni Morrison: Part 1 – On Love and Writing," *Moyers & Company*, 11 Mar 2011, 8 May 2014 <http://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/>.
[80] Moyers <http://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/>.

3.1. *Beloved* as Women's Slave Narrative

A number of African American intellectuals, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison and Cornell West were concerned about "black invisibility and namelessness"[81] in American history and literature. The primary records of the lives of African Americans during the period of slavery in the United States were slave narratives. The statistics by Cornell University Library state that approximately 6 000 slave narratives were published so far, and that only 12 % of them were written by women.[82] The most well-known women's slave narratives include Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Those narratives tend to be overshadowed by narratives written by male fugitive slaves, such as Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853).

Morrison reacts to the absence of black women in American history and offers a point of view of a black woman. Simultaneously, Morrison historical presents events that affected primarily black mothers. In *Beloved*, for instance, Morrison re-interprets the story of Margaret Garner, a Kentucky slave mother who committed infanticide in 1856.[83] In the Foreword, Morrison writes:

> The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes. So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's "place." The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; assume the consequences of choosing infanticide; claim her own freedom.[84]

Though contradictory, Garner's case has been interpreted as an example of semi-fictional women's slave narrative by Morrison. Lorraine Liscio, the director of Women's Studies at Boston College, formulates the basic objective of the women's slave narratives as follows: "Slave narratives attest to the fact that while black men's quest for freedom took shape of reclaiming their manhood, women's preponderant concern was to save their children and

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[81] Cornell West, "Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization," *The Cornell West Reader* (New York: Basic *Civitas* Books, 1999) 113.
[82] "Slave Narratives," *'I Will Be Heard!' Abolitionism in America*, Cornell University Library, 2002, 1 Jun 2014 < http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/abolitionism/narratives/Narratives.htm>.
[83] William L. Andrews and Nellie McKay, *Toni Morrison's* Beloved*: A Casebook* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) 42.
[84] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage, 2005) 11.

retain control over their reproductive power."[85] Attempts to claim one's own freedom by characters in *Beloved* reflect the same pattern of slave narratives that Liscio mentioned – while male characters such as Paul D, Halle and Stamp Paid struggle to identify themselves with their role as men in the racially divided society, Sethe and Baby Suggs are concerned with creating their own image of motherhood. The opposition between male and female points of view concerning slavery is reflected in the language of the novel:

> "They used cowhide on you?"
>
> "And they took my milk."
>
> "They beat you and you was pregnant?"
>
> "And they took my milk!"[86]

On this dialogue, Liscio illustrates the way in which Paul D reacts to Sethe's story – he comments only to those topics that he experienced on his own and that could be associated with the male experience of slavery, such as the use of cowhide and the tree on Sethe's back.[87] Morrison is aware of the fact that the female account of slavery would be significantly different from the male one, and thus attempts to analyze the nature of Garner's act by identifying with typically feminine concepts, including maternity and homemaking.

3.2. The Semiotic Aspect of Language in *Beloved*

Morrison adapts the language of *Beloved* for the purpose of conveying the subjective account of slavery. Using of the semiotic (maternal) aspect of language results in the narrative strategy which Liscio calls "writing the mother's milk," in which the process of signifying is based primarily on mother-child bond.[88] The narrative lacks chronology and includes fragments of children's songs and memories. Its language is lyrical, and includes the imitation of children's language in the process of signifying.[89] Liscio explains Morrison's strategy as follows:

> In resisting the deadly conventions of white narrative, Morrison's narrator privileges a perception and pre-linguistic code of communication associated with infancy. Such communication offers an alternate mode meant like other rhetorical figuration used by

[85] Lorraine Liscio, "*Beloved*'s Narrative: Writing Mother's Milk," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11.1 (1992): 34.
[86] Morrison, *Beloved* 21.
[87] Liscio 34.
[88] Liscio 39.
[89] Camelia Talebian Sadehi, "*Beloved* and Julia Kristeva's the Semiotic and the Symbolic," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2.7 (2012): 1492.

> black writers to break white hegemony's control and create their own identity through naming themselves.[90]

As was mentioned in the first chapter, slaves who arrived in the United States from Africa were stripped off their African identities, including their names. Typically, slaves and their offspring were given European names and surnames of their white masters. This tendency could be illustrated with the names of male slaves in Sweet Home: Paul A Garner, Paul D Garner and Paul F Garner. The only exceptions are Sixo, whose name remotely resembles a name of African origin, and Halle Suggs. Halle was supposedly named by his mother Baby Suggs, whose name is discussed in the novel. Baby Suggs has been sold as Jenny Whitlow, Whitlow being the name of her previous owner. When she claims that her husband called her Baby, Mr. Garner comments that such a name is not suitable for a free black woman. There is a certain irony in the statement, since Jenny Whitlow was Baby Suggs's slave name. As a free woman, Baby Suggs has the right to choose which name to use, and decides for Baby Suggs, the name given to her by her deceased husband and associated with her son – not with her white master.

Similarly, Sethe creates her own names for her children in order to avoid the conventions of naming slaves according to their white masters. Sethe's unconventional naming strategies resemble the process of signifying of a very young child. The tendency could be traced in the naming of Sethe's daughters. The name of her murdered daughter remains unknown. Until her premature death, Beloved is referred to as "crawling-already? baby girl."[91] After her death and subsequent revival, she is called Beloved, in accordance with the inscription on her tombstone. Similarly, instead of giving her second daughter one of the names that were typical for female slaves in the South during the late nineteenth-century, Sethe might have decided to call her youngest child Denver, according to Amy Denver, the white girl in search of velvet.

Amy is a crucial character considering the naming process. Her name might be an English form of the Old French name Amée, meaning "beloved."[92] The meaning corresponds with the writing on the tombstone of Sethe's older daughter. Sethe wanted to put "Dearly Beloved" on the tombstone, but had enough money for "Beloved" only. Sethe might have wanted to put into words her mother love, independent of racial issues. Similarly, Sethe's

[90] Liscio 39.
[91] Morrison, *Beloved* 122.
[92] "Amy," *Behind the Name*, 26 Jun 2014 < http://www.behindthename.com/name/amy>.

decision to use a part of Amy's name as the name for her daughter might be connected with the theme of velvet:

> Well, Lu, velvet is like the world was just born. Clean and new and so smooth. The velvet I seen was brown, but in Boston they got all colors. Carmine. That means red but when you talk about velvet you got to say "carmine."[93]

Amy describes velvet in connection to maternal concepts with which Sethe could identify, such as childbirth. Amy searches for carmine velvet – the color red is commonly associated with blood, which is connected to giving birth to the baby. Similarly, the smoothness of velvet might resemble baby's skin. Those characteristics of velvet might have led Sethe to name her younger daughter Denver. To sum up, Sethe bases her process of signifying on the connection between her own body and the person she is naming, which implies a relationship between two subjects rather than a subject/object relationship.

3.3. Writing Black Mother's Body

Besides a distinctive method of naming and signifying, Morrison employs a narrative strategy that associates language with the image of a black female body. According to Jean Wyatt, the author of "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Sethe tends to define herself as a maternal body.[94] Her view on herself is based on the view of black femininity in white community. Hazel V. Carby claims that female slaves were considered to be property of their white masters; therefore, giving birth to black children represented a way of ensuring the economic security of the individual plantation. The economic value of black women's reproductive ability then supposedly erased the opposition between womanhood and motherhood.[95] Sethe identifies herself with her primary role as a mother, as her other roles of a wife and a worker were significantly reduced and performed collectively by the slave community. For these reasons, Sethe is profoundly aware of the body parts that enable her to perform her role as a mother. Due to her role in the economy of the plantation, Sethe's body is represented as a fluid substance with unclear boundaries shared by people around her. It is reflected in the narrative structure, which is not chronological and presents no linearity as well as no boundaries to Sethe's consciousness. The events are filtered

[93] Morrison, *Beloved* 40-41.
[94] Jean Wyatt, "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *PMLA* 108.3 (1993): 474.
[95] Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the African-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 25.

through Sethe's point of view and described in association to her body, particularly its female parts, such as breasts.

3.4. Breasts and Mother's Milk

Breasts have several meanings in the narrative. First, they are a primary connection between a mother and her child, providing mother's milk. Second, Wyatt suggests that the weight of Sethe's breasts is associated with the abstract value of responsibility.[96] Morrison writes: "What she knew was that the responsibility for her breast, at last, was in somebody else's hands."[97] As the primary source of nurture for her children, Sethe's breasts become a reminder of the broken connection between her dead daughter and herself. Her breasts no longer serve for nurturing and connecting the mother to her child, their function therefore loses its importance. After Paul D's arrival, Sethe is able to turn responsibility into something trivial: an object of man's sexual desire.[98] By becoming the object of Paul D's interest, Sethe's breasts re-gain their function of bonding – the bond between a mother and a child is eventually replaced by the bond between a woman and a man, which represents a positive development in terms of Sethe's subjectivity. Sethe becomes aware of the oppressive force of her mother love, which she perceives as a reminder of her past trauma. Consequently, Sethe attempts to relieve herself from the confining mother-child bond:

> Would there be a little space, she wondered, a little time, some way to hold off eventfulness, to push busyness into the corners of the room and just stand there a minute or two, naked from the shoulder blade to waist, relieved of the weight of her breasts, smelling the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread? [...][99]

The bond between Sethe and Paul D is not that of a marriage, and its purpose is not procreation. Paul D, who is holding Sethe's breasts, does not need to be nurtured and protected, which enables Sethe to reassume her role as a woman.

3.5. Mother-Child Bonds

Undeveloped, loosened, severed and restored maternal bonds form the core of Morrison's novel. An example of an undeveloped bond could be the bond between Sethe and her biological mother. Sethe's mother tries to establish a connection with Sethe by showing

[96] Wyatt 475.
[97] Morrison, *Beloved* 21.
[98] Michelle Mock, "Spitting out the Seed: Ownership of Mother, Child, Breasts, Milk and Voice in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *EBSCOhost.* 14 July 2014 <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/9611140962/spitting-out-seed-ownership-mother-child-breasts-milk-voice-toni-morrisons>.
[99] Morrison, *Beloved* 21.

her a mark under her breast. The mark functions as a substitute for mother's milk – Sethe's mother was not able to form the bond with her daughter by providing mother's milk, therefore she uses the mark as a source of identification, since she is the last woman in the plantation with that particular mark under her breast:

> Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right under her rib was a circle and a cross burnt right in the skin. She said, 'This is your ma'am. This,' and she pointed. 'I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark.[100]

The mark, however, does not function only as a source of identification, but also a means of protection. When Sethe wants to have a mark of her own, she gets slapped. By these means, her mother warns Sethe about opposing values of those marks, which symbolize black mother's vulnerability within the slavery system – the slave mother gets her mark only after the connection with her children is broken. A similar situation happens when Sethe's milk is taken and replaced by a "tree" on her back.

Mother's milk represents the first essential connection between Sethe and her daughter, and the primary source of identification. In fear that the child would forget her mother's face, Sethe establishes the bond with her daughter through mother's milk. For this reason, she does not allow other women to breastfeed the child:

> All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it.[101]

Although meant for Beloved, Sethe's milk was taken by the Schoolteacher's boys. By this part of the narrative, Morrison dramatizes the tendency of slave owners to employ young black mothers as wet nurses. The supply of mother's milk was insured for white children, but not for black children. By having her milk taken, the bond between the mother and her child is severed. The loss of the primary source of identification results in the murder of the child as

[100] Morrison, *Beloved* 72.
[101] Morrison, *Beloved* 19.

the last attempt to save it from the oppressing forces of slavery as well as the most extreme attempt to keep the child in her control.

3.6. Infanticide and the Dissolution of the Family

The murder of Sethe's daughter is presented as a tragic consequence of the crisis of black motherhood in the Old South. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos writes:

> Sethe's original bonding with her children has occurred at the ironically named Sweet Home, where slaves are allowed to marry and have families. These bonds resurge with terrifying strength as Sethe attempts to return the babies to perhaps collective mother body, to devour them back into the security of womb/tomb death much as a mother cat will eat her babies as the ultimate act of protection.[102]

Demetrakopoulos indirectly points out to the tendency to impose white Christian values on slaves which was mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis. The slaves were forced to adopt the model of Christian marriage. Its consequences might illustrate the ability of slaves to identify with predominant values, but its legal value was not recognized, therefore, it only created the illusion of freedom. Sethe was given permission to choose a husband. Sethe chose Halle because of his mother – by marrying him, Sethe created a relatively unified family unit consisting of a husband, a wife, a grandmother and legitimate children. Sethe therefore created the black alternative of a complete white Christian family:

> Sethe had the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that "somebody" son who had fathered every one of her children. A blessing she was reckless enough to for granted, lean on, as though Sweet Home really was one. As though a handful of myrtle stuck in the handle of a pressing iron propped against the door in a whitewoman's kitchen could make it hers. As though mint sprig in the mouth changed the breath as well as its odor. A bigger fool never lived.[103]

In her novels, however, Morrison analyses the adoption of such Christian family models which are in stark contrast with the experience of black mothers in women's slave narratives, represented by Baby Suggs:

> Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized. So Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life

[102] Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, "Maternal Bonds as Devourers of Women's Individuation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *African American Review* 26.1 (1992):52-53.
[103] Morrison, *Beloved* 28.

> was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children.[104]

White forms of familial bonds could not possibly be sustained in the conditions in which African-Americans lived. When the bond between Sethe and her child is broken, Sethe decides to kill her daughter not only to save her from slavery, but also from the possibility of disillusionment concerning motherhood. Demetrakopoulos compares Sethe with Sophie from Styron's *Sophie's Choice*: "For Sethe, like Sophie, to kill her own daughter is to kill her own best self, to kill her best and self-gendered fantasy of the future."[105] The explanation corresponds with Sethe's description of mother love: "Needing to be good enough, alert enough, strong enough, that caring – again. Having to stay alive just that much longer. [...] Unless carefree, mother love was a killer."[106] Sethe believes that Beloved's love for her future children will be too "thick,"[107] like her own. In order to save her second daughter from the burden of motherhood, Sethe becomes extremely protective towards Denver, which results in the strong, mutually limiting bond.

3.7. Denver: Oedipus Complex

For many literary critics, including Lorraine Liscio and Barbara Schapiro, Sethe's attempt to protect her remaining child has resulted in Denver's fear of her own mother. In Schapiro's article "The Bonds of Love and Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Schapiro describes Denver's ambivalent relationship with her mother. On the one hand, Denver feels protected by Sethe. On the other hand, she is terrified of Sethe's destructive love.[108] In the chapter narrated from Denver's point of view, Morrison writes:

> I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it. She missed killing my brothers and they knew it. [...] All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again.[109]

For Denver, her love for Sethe is necessary for her survival – if she attempts to break the bond with her mother and leave the house, she will be killed like her sister:

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[104] Morrison, *Beloved* 27-28.
[105] Demetrakopoulos 53.
[106] Morrison, *Beloved* 155.
[107] Morrison, *Beloved* 193.
[108] Barbara Schapiro, "The Bonds of Love and the Boundaries of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *Contemporary Literature* 32.2 (1991): 205.
[109] Morrison, *Beloved* 242.

> I spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me, loving her even when she braided my head at night. I never let her know my daddy was coming for me. Grandma Baby thought he was coming, too. [...][110]

Even braiding the hair, an activity commonly associated with the bond between mothers and daughters, represents a traumatic experience for Denver. Liscio compares Denver's fear to the Oedipus complex in a boy – Denver's fear of having her throat cut is in its intensity similar to the fear of castration.[111] Sethe represents both the oppressor and the object of Denver's attraction. Since Denver's father Halle is not present, Denver temporarily assumes the role of the protector and attempts to protect Beloved from Sethe's murderous love:

> I thought she was trying to kill her that day in the Clearing. Kill her back. But then she kissed her neck and I have to warn her about that. Don't love her too much. Don't. Maybe it's still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children. I have to tell her. I have to protect her.[112]

Like Sethe, Denver becomes the slave of her own protective instinct – she shifts from the need to be protected to the need to protect. Both Sethe's and Denver's fear of separation enables them to exist for each other, but it does not allow them to exist for themselves and recognize their values as individual beings.

3.8. Beloved

Beloved's identity is complex and at the same time crucial for the analysis of the concept of subjectivity in Morrison's novel. Two interpretations of her origin are provided by Jennifer L. Holden-Kirwan. Beloved may represent either Sethe's resurrected child or her biological mother.[113] Both interpretations are applicable since Beloved's mind includes both infant memories of Sethe and memories of an unnamed woman on a ship that brought slaves to the American continent. This woman, however, may not necessarily be Sethe's mother. Rather, she may be an embodiment of the experience of black women under slavery. As both a ghost of a dead child and a reminder of the past, Beloved is extremely angry and possessive. According to Schapiro, who considers Beloved to be Sethe's resurrected daughter, Beloved's rage and jealousy directed towards the residents of 124 Bluestone Road originate from the need to be recognized. Her theory is connected to Jessica Benjamin's notion of the mutual

[110] Morrison, *Beloved* 245.
[111] Liscio 36.
[112] Morrison, *Beloved* 243.
[113] Jennifer L. Holden-Kirwan, "Looking into the Self that Is No Self: An Examination of Subjectivity in *Beloved*," *African American Review* 32.3 (1998): 416.

relationship which is necessary for the development of a child as a subject.[114] Schapiro argues that such a development was not possible under slavery conditions – since black mothers were not allowed to consider themselves subjects, they were incapable of recognizing their children as subjects.[115] In order to be recognized, Beloved prevents Sethe from turning her attention to men. She forces Sethe's sons Howard and Buglar to leave the house and attempts to seduce Paul D. This behavior resembles both the behavior of a daughter who does not want to share her mother with a man, and the need for protection from the sexual exploitation encoded in enslaved African American women. As a representation of the past of African Americans, Beloved needs to be recognized, too. The interpretation is connected to the absence of black women's voices in the history of the United States. As both the daughter and the embodiment of the terrors of slavery, Beloved haunts Sethe's conscience and binds her mind to the past, thus preventing her from claiming her freed self. Sethe attempts to define identities of her own children by giving them unconventional names, and tries to prevent objectification of her children by establishing firm connections with her children.

3.9. Freedom and Motherhood

"You've already been bought and paid for, your ancestors already gave it up for you. It's already done. You don't have to do that anymore. Now you can love yourself. It's already possible,"[116] Morrison claimed in her interview for *Moyers & Company*. The quote summarizes Sethe's attempts to claim her own freedom, which consisted of accepting herself as an individual with certain personal and social value. During slavery, this value consisted almost exclusively of black women's abilities to reproduce. Later, it was codified by religious traditions which demanded women to be married and devote their lives to their children. Here lies one of the most striking differences between Stowe's and Morrison's approach to the ideal of the Moral Mother. Like Eliza, Sethe is devoted to her children with all her being. As opposed to Eliza, Sethe is connected to her children to the extent that she cannot recognize the boundaries between her body and the bodies of her daughters. Her devotion results in "thick" love and constant caring, which deprives Sethe, as well as her children, of their freedom. Sethe's daughters then represent crucial elements in the process of recognizing Sethe's subjectivity. Denver's dependence on her mother and Beloved's attempts to become one with Sethe prevent Sethe from claiming her own freedom. Beloved is parasitizing on Sethe, even to

[114] Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love* (Toronto: Pantheon Books, 1988) 53.
[115] Schapiro197.
[116] Moyers <http://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/>.

the point of reducing Sethe's role in her family and community. By attempting to seduce Sethe's lover Paul D, Beloved deprives Sethe from her role as a woman. Moreover, she drinks all the water and eats all the food in Sethe's house, and even persuades Sethe to leave her job, which represents the source of financial support not only for Sethe's children, but also for Sethe herself. By these means, Sethe is reduced to the image of self-sacrificing mother, who is only concerned with the needs of her children, and who has no needs on her own. Sethe's devotion to her children becomes the main constituent of her character, and all attempts to establish a personal space, where Sethe would be able to assert her own individuality, are proved futile. This image of self-sacrificing mother love is in contrast with the image of motherhood proposed by Stowe. Both Stowe's and Morrison's views on motherhood are compared and contrasted in the next chapter.

4. Representations of Black Motherhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*

Both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Toni Morrison identified with at least three roles in society – they considered themselves to be women, mothers and writers. As women, Stowe and Morrison were preoccupied with their position in society. As mothers, both attempted to define their own image of motherhood. And finally, as writers, both used their literary works to mediate their ideas and criticism concerning women's role in the patriarchal society. For these purposes, the majority of their works was based on themes and concepts connected with womanhood. Motherhood, which constitutes one of the most dominant sources of female identity, represents a central theme in both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*. This chapter will compare narrative strategies, methods of characterization of female protagonists and representations of black motherhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved* in order to illustrate the impact of stereotypical images of black womanhood on the process of claiming African-American women's freedom.

4.1. Narrative strategies

Narrative strategies employed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved* determine the overall presentation of black mothers' experience. Stowe and Morrison use contrasting techniques which result in either objective or subjective accounts of narrated events. The structure of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is predominantly linear and the events are narrated in a chronological order from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, who reflects on the main political, social and cultural issues of the period. The narrator, however, does not assume a position of a mere observer, but comments on the plot and even lectures the reader on moral and religious concepts. Often, the narrator directly addresses the reader in an attempt to make him/her empathize with the characters. For example, in the scene in which Eliza Harris leaves the Shelby plantation, the narrator asks the reader: "If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn away from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning [...] how fast could *you* walk?"[117] In this excerpt, the narrator directly appeals to a particular group of readers, i. e. white mothers. It suggests the target audience for Stowe's novel – white, middle-class women with religious upbringing. Rather than emotional consequences of slavery concerning black mothers, Stowe is preoccupied with white mothers, appealing to their moral sense and trying to preserve the ideology of the Moral Mother. It is not surprising that soon after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's sentimental

[117] Stowe, *Uncle* 105.

rhetoric and the theme of the moral power of women became objects of criticism. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, Julian Hawthorne, an American novelist and the son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, criticized *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his *History of American Literature* (1891): "[A] more emotional, impassioned, one-sided book was never written."[118] More severe criticism followed and in the twentieth century, it has become commonplace to argue that Stowe's narrative strategy, together with her dependence on white Christian principles of womanhood, did not allow her to develop complex feminine subjectivity, since both black and white characters in her novel are limited by the ideal of moral motherhood.[119]

The narrative of *Beloved* follows conventions of women's slave narrative to a certain extent. It is considered to be a retelling of the story of Margaret Garner. In comparison to narratives of other early African-American female authors, such as Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs, *Beloved* is not a description of slavery, listing crucial events and major abolitionist arguments. It rather resembles an emotional landscape that does not adhere to the rules of linearity. The circumstances of major political developments like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 are filtered through the point of view of a slave woman, whose image of the horrors of slavery is different from the image presented in the majority of women's slave narratives. Although the destruction of black families remains the major theme of *Beloved*, Morrison focuses on the subjective account of black mother's experience of slavery:

> "Slavery is very predictable," [Morrison] said. "There it is, and there's some stuff about how it is, and then you get out of it or you don't. It can't be driven by slavery. It has to be the interior life of some people, a small group of people, and everything that they do is impacted on by the horror of slavery, but they are also people."[120]

Morrison's interest in interior lives of African-American mothers is reflected in her attempt to convey the nature of black woman's inner consciousness.[121] The novel depicts not only Sethe's inner thoughts, but also attempts to give a voice to Denver and Beloved, whose vocabulary and ability to signify are limited. The events described in *Beloved* are directly connected to the novel's African-American characters, excluding the concepts and motives irrelevant for African-American circumstances. Consequently, female characters are

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[118] Liz Sonneborn, *Leaders of Civil War Era: Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009) 92.
[119] Wearn 35.
[120] Mervyn Rothstein, "Toni Morrison, in Her New Novel, Defends Women," *The New York Times*, 26 Aug 1987, 29 June 2014 < http://
www.nytimes.com/1987/08/26/books/toni-morrison-in-her-new-novel-defends-women.html>.
[121] Wyatt 474.

portrayed as subjects, and meant for African-American readers to identify with, whereas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, black female characters are portrayed as the stereotypical images of blackness and objects of sympathy of white readers.

4.2. Methods of Characterization: Sethe and Eliza

Modern critical reactions focus mainly on Stowe's method of characterization that gave birth to a number of stereotypes concerning the representation of black women in American society. Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* represents a text which was crucial for the course of the abolitionist movement, it is controversial in a sense that it presents what Aretha Mmphiri describes as "[American] culture's most pernicious image of African Americans."[122] Despite the fact that the description of slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* emphasizes the basic concepts that were supposed to be common to all people regardless of their race and social status, such as family and motherhood, the stereotypical images of African-Americans are considered to be naïve, unauthentic and even racist:

> Like most white writers of her day, Harriet Beecher Stowe could not escape the racism of the time. Because of this, her work has some serious flaws, which in turn have helped perpetuate damaging images of African Americans [...].[123]

Stowe's approach supports the image of blacks as "poor, simple, dependent creatures"[124] that have no social and cultural background, and need to be instructed in accordance with American social, religious and cultural practices, which were perceived as right by white community. According to Nina Baym, Stowe based her method of characterization on the Victorian presumption that women and men are essentially different. For Baym, female novelists in the nineteenth-century America believed that values such as duty, discipline, self-control and sacrifice represented advantages for women to survive under oppression.[125] Stowe assigned those values to the characters of enslaved mothers to illustrate that the principles of moral motherhood were common to all women, regardless of their race and social status. In her novel, Stowe presented a black heroine who is an embodiment of those values. Eliza Harris is undoubtedly dutiful and disciplined. Mrs. Shelby herself taught her the duties of a Christian mother – she encouraged her to marry, have a child, and teach her son the principles of Christian faith. By these means, Eliza was taught to follow the example of white models of

[122] Aretha Mmphiri, *Toni Morrison and the Literary Canon: Whiteness, Blackness, and the Construction of Racial Identity*, MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 2009: 7.
[123] "Slave Narratives and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Africans in America*, 29 June 2014 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2958.html>.
[124] Stowe, *Uncle* 48.
[125] Baym 113.

motherhood, such as Emily Shelby, Mary Bird and Rachel Halliday. Consequently, she mourns the departure from the safe, domestic place of Shelby's household. To sum up, Eliza Harris is characterized primarily in connection to the ideal of white femininity and mother love, and she is one of the earliest examples of the Black Mammy. She is an obedient domestic servant, who is precise, punctual and loyal to her mistress, and her love for Harry goes beyond slavery and also beyond herself.

Morrison's method of characterization is employed in connection to her narrative strategy. Morrison provides the description of blacks as both objects and subjects to illustrate the difference between subjective and objective methods of characterization of African-American women. It could be illustrated on the way Sethe is characterized. Other characters, such as Paul D, Denver and Beloved, describe Sethe as an exceptionally strong, proud, "iron-eyed"[126] woman. Sethe's eyes may symbolize her inner strength, pride and inclination towards resistance. Sethe does not divert her eyes from the dog crippled by the ghost, and even maintains to keep her "iron eyes" in front of her oppressors. In some cases, Sethe is presented as cold, collected and distant. However, the representation of Sethe's inner consciousness uncovers devotion to her children, which results from the past trauma, and which prevents her from recognizing her personal value. Sethe attempts to re-establish her role as a worker in the local restaurant, providing for herself and Denver, and takes the role of a woman in her relationship with Paul D. Sethe, however, struggles with her role as a mother. As opposed to Stowe, Morrison does not provide a model of either white or black womanhood for Sethe to identify with. In Sweet Home, there is no white model of motherhood equivalent to Stowe's Emily Shelby, Mary Bird and Rachel Halliday. Sweet Home is not a ground of matriarchal effort – Sethe's mistress, Mrs. Garner, deliberately draws an opposition between Sethe's and her own status, dismissing the importance of Sethe's intention to marry Halle and not allowing her to have a wedding ceremony. The only example of maternal behavior is Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs' experience with family bonds is significantly different from the typical image of the white middle-class Christian family proposed by Stowe. Baby Suggs' views on motherhood are more or less accurate for a woman in her age and condition, but her experience of motherhood is perceived as too cold and traumatic by Sethe. Sethe criticizes Baby Suggs for letting herself remember only small things about her children, and tries to prevent similar situation by creating an oppressing, self-sacrificing bond with Denver. She is preoccupied with the protection of her remaining child to

[126] Morrison, *Beloved* 13.

the point that any form of Sethe's self-awareness is based on the connection between her and Denver's body.

4.3. Realistic Versus Idealized Image of Motherhood

"The novel was memorable for so many because of its powerful accounts of distraught mothers and vulnerable children [,]"[127] Lois Brown claimed, and by these means, she summarized reactions of a number of readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe employs mother characters who act as female saviors in order to transform the predominating patriarchal social order.[128] Mother figures typically stand above the patriarchal institution of slavery – the study of the Bible and education in Catechism cultivated compassion for suffering in women, and their care for children enabled them to empathize with the horrors of slavery, which, according to Stowe, consisted of the separation of families and preventing women to assume their role as mothers. Critical responses to Stowe, however, are concerned with the specific image of motherhood portrayed in the novel. Erica Galioto, who is preoccupied with specific realizations of female identity in connection to motherhood, asserts:

> Anticipating the overt refusal of white readers to enter into the feeling of a black other, Stowe universalizes maternal feeling, but in so doing, removes the distinction of the slave experience and depersonalizes their relationships. By generalizing the idea that all mothers, regardless of race, love and protect their children, she lessons the otherness of the other to facilitate a white identificatory relationship.[129]

The image of black motherhood depicted in Stowe's novel is not based on an authentic experience of female slaves. Black mothers are constantly compared to role models of white motherhood such as Mrs. Shelby, Mary Bird and Rachel Halliday. Those models serve as mediators of distinctly white economic, religious and cultural values, which originate in mother love. Stowe describes mother love as a force coming from the heart, which is equivalent to the unconditioned and self-sacrificing love of Christ. Eliza's escape from the Shelby's plantation, for example, serves neither the purpose of asserting Eliza's selfhood nor is it an attempt to gain personal freedom – it is perceived as a selfless maternal effort to preserve the family union.[130]

In reality, however, family unions between black mothers and children were constantly threatened by business affairs of their masters. In her dissertation, Kinitra Dechaun

[127] Brown <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/brown/brown.html>.
[128] Jordan-Lake 20.
[129] Galioto <http://www.womenwriters.net/january10/Galioto.html>.
[130] Jordan-Lake 29.

Brooks assigns the lack of identificatory relationship between mothers and children to the absence of African features in the identity of black mothers. In African communities, women represented important units on which husbands and children were dependent. As slaves, the role of black women was reduced to giving birth to children. Satisfying the basic needs of slave children was a matter of collective efforts of all female slaves, but usually not children's biological mothers. This tendency resulted in "natal alienation," or inability of African-American mothers to create familial bonds with their children.[131] Consequently, black women were denied the right to categorize themselves as unique entities distinct from other individuals, and remained within the boundaries of the position designed by social, economical and cultural stratification.

In *Beloved,* Morrison attempted to illustrate motherhood as a part of black women's existence that had an effect not only on the moral, economic and religious principles taught in slave communities, but also, and most importantly, on black mothers themselves. For these purposes, Morrison centered the narrative of her novel on a family that consisted predominantly of female members in order to measure the boundaries that restricted the freedom of African-American mothers, and to define the obstructions that prevented them from claiming their own freedom. By these means, Morrison attempted to provide a subjective account of Garner's case, which represented one of the few historical facts that reflected the effect of slavery on the consciousness of African-American mothers in American history. Morrison did not attempt to stigmatize Garner. Instead, she analyzed the nature of Garner's case, and tried to define circumstances that might have led Garner to infanticide.

> This is a real dilemma. "Shall I permit my children, who are my best thing, to live like I have lived, and I know that's terrible, or to take them out?" So [Garner] decided to kill them, and kill herself. And that was noble. That was the identification. She was saying: "I'm a human being. These are my children. This script I am writing."[132]

Morrison was undoubtedly aware of the necessity of identificatory bonds between mothers and children. As I have already mentioned in the preceding chapter, according to Jessica Benjamin, the author of *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, the process of recognizing one's own subjectivity cannot proceed independently from the social environment – the mutual recognition between a mother and her child is necessary to the emotional development of the child. Benjamin claims: "In order to exist for

[131] Kinitra Dechaun Brooks, *The Black Maternal: Heterogeneity and Resistance in Literary Representations of Black Mothers in 20th Century African American and Afro-Caribbean Women's Fiction*, Diss., Chapel Hill, 2008: 16.
[132] Moyers <http://billmoyers.com/content/toni-morrison-part-1/>.

oneself, one has to exist for an other."[133] Morrison stressed the importance of maternal function in the development of the infant's subjectivity. The only way to preserve this kind of connection during slavery was to prevent the separation of a mother from her child. Garner, therefore, might have chosen the only way to "protect" her child from the oppressive force of slavery, and that was to kill her children and then herself.

In *Beloved*, Morrison presented two extremes – the murder of one's own child and self-sacrificing effort to maintain mother-child bonds. Morrison concentrates on emotional rather than legal consequences of Sethe's act. Morrison reflects on Margaret Garner's case, which came to the court as a case of damaging property.[134] Morrison attempts to present Sethe as a human being suffering from the past trauma, which urges her to protect her daughter Denver forever. The devotion for one's own child and a complete denial of one's own needs might have been one of the characteristics of a good Christian mother proposed by Stowe. Stowe, however, did not focus on the effect of Eliza's maternal behavior on Harry, as opposed to Morrison who took this behavior to its extreme. Morrison shifted attention to Denver at the certain point of the novel, in order to illustrate the fact that Sethe's self-sacrificing mentality affects not only her own emotional development, but also that of her daughter. At the beginning of the novel, Denver is portrayed as a shy, lonely and dependent young woman who lacks her mother's capabilities, but is unable to define her identity apart from Sethe. Her growth from girlhood to womanhood is enabled by Beloved's presence. Beloved's oppressive behavior towards Sethe forces Denver to leave the house on 124 Bluestone Road and reconnect with society. By these means, both Beloved's and Denver's departure liberates Sethe from the effects of her past trauma and the image of motherhood as constant caring and protection of her children. Only when Sethe manages to let go of her children is she able to recognize her own freedom, and separate her role as a woman from her role as a mother.

[133] Benjamin 53.
[134] Delores M. Walters, "Margaret Garner," *Margaret Garner: A New American Opera*, 22 July 2014 <http://margaretgarner.org/MargaretGarnerBrief.pdf>.

Conclusion

"Certainly no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written *for* black people – no more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written for Uncle Tom to read or be persuaded by,"[135] Morrison writes. The issue of white cultural hegemony preoccupies the majority of African-American authors of fiction and literary criticism, including Toni Morrison. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination,* Morrison considers the ways in which blackness is constructed and presented in canonical literature, and illustrates her argument on selected works of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway. Although she does not provide a detailed analysis of Stowe's work, Morrison does not consider *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be a record of an authentic experience of African-Americans. In *Beloved*, Morrison attempts to convey a subjective image of slavery independently from the set of values and literary conventions adopted under the impression of universal knowledge by the white society of the United States. This thesis covered the main differences between Morrison's subjective and Stowe's seemingly objective account of African-American mothers' experience of slavery presented in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved*. These differences were reflected in the distinctive narrative strategies, methods of characterization and images of motherhood that the two novels presented.

Firstly, the thesis analyzed the distinctive narrative strategies in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Beloved* to illustrate the difference between more authentic and idealized images of African-American motherhood. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicts the horrors of slavery from the point of view of a white woman. Consequently, black mothers are portrayed as objects – they are constantly compared to their white counterparts in an attempt to find similar patterns in maternal behavior and to enable white female readers to identify with the situation of black mothers during slavery. As opposed to Stowe, Morrison attempts to present her female characters as subjects by giving a voice to the black mother, her daughter and an infant. By these means, she illustrates the difference between a subjective and a seemingly objective account of the experiences of African-American mothers during slavery.

Secondly, Stowe's and Morrison's methods of characterization were compared and contrasted. Stowe's female characters are characterized in comparison to the terms that constitute whiteness; therefore, they are either whitewashed or exaggerated. Eliza, Aunt Chloe, Mammy and Cassy are assigned characteristics such as physical beauty, pride,

[135] Morrison, *Playing* 16-17.

submissiveness and domestic abilities. These characters fall into the category of either the Tragic Mulatto or the Black Mammy. Another type of characters, represented by Old Dinah, conveys the image of African-American women as manly, rough and untidy, which are characteristics associated with blackness. Similarly to Stowe, Morrison portrays her female characters as victims of slavery and she also depicts separations of families. Yet, in *Beloved*, the destruction of the image of a black family, the model of which was inspired by the white Christian nuclear family, was perceived rather as a disruption of basic Western social, cultural and religious values. The novel includes Sethe's attempt to perform her role according to the ideal of white womanhood against the oppressive forces of slavery. Yet the indirect result was the murder of her first daughter and the development of controlling and oppressing mother love towards her second daughter. Consequently, both Sethe and Denver are unable to define their identities as individuals independently from their social roles as a mother and a daughter. Morrison might not consider the white Christian model of the nuclear family according to the ideology of the Moral Mother as compatible with black women's position as slaves. Instead, Morrison might prefer more traditional approach to black womanhood, in which the relationships were based on mutual recognition and cooperation.

Lastly, the thesis contrasted Stowe's and Morrison's images of motherhood. Stowe considered slavery as a threat to basic Christian values. Constant separations of black families represented a threat to the white Christian institution of marriage and distinctly female mission of giving birth to young moral Christians. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does not consider effects of such a model of motherhood on black mother's inner consciousness, and the consequences of self-sacrificing mother love on black children's emotional development. These issues represent the subject matter of Morrison's *Beloved. Beloved* illustrates the paradoxical value of Stowe's ideology of motherhood, in which motherhood does not represent a liberating experience that would be simply beneficial for both black mothers and their children. Rather, it represents the white Christian image of self-sacrificing motherhood also as an obstruction in the emotional development of both mothers and children, and prevents them from recognizing their subjectivity and claiming of their freed self.

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